

Backing Indigenous Ability

AIATSIS Response to the Discussion Paper

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is Australia's premier institution for information about the cultures and lifestyles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Institute

- promotes scholarly, ethical community-based research
- promotes knowledge and understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present
- houses a world class collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resource materials including the world's largest collections of printed resource materials for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies
- holds a priceless collection of unique sound recordings, pictures, films and videos numbering over one million items
- publishes quality research and writing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures via papers, a journal and in book form through the Aboriginal Studies Press.

AIATSIS is governed by a Council of nine members, four of whom are elected by the Institute's membership. The remaining five members, who must be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, are appointed by the Minister for Education, Science and Training.

The current AIATSIS Council members are

- Professor Michael (Mick) Dodson, AM - Chairperson
- Emir. Professor Robert Tonkinson - Deputy Chairperson
- Mr Eric (Dickie) Bedford
- Professor Larissa Behrendt
- Ms Jackie Huggins, AM
- Ms Raymattja Marika
- Ms Natascha McNamara, AM, MBE
- Professor Martin Nakata
- Mr Michael Williams

A staff of approximately 100 people, directed by the AIATSIS Principal, engages in a range of activities of interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, scholars and the general public.

Digitisation — Creating Better Access to the Institute's Collections for Australian Indigenous People

The AIATSIS Audiovisual Archives and Library hold the world's most extensive collections of printed, audio, and visual materials on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander topics. Following the provision of special funding for digitisation activity, AIATSIS is also now a leading Australian agency for the

provision of its collections in digital formats. Most recently AIATSIS received \$13m from the Federal Government for the period 2005—2008 to digitise key materials which were at risk of deterioration and to make selected material available on the Internet.

These materials are used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for many reasons, including language and ceremony revitalisation, native title, establishing keeping places, family history and for developing educational products. The collections are used by Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, museums, galleries, as well as the general public. The Institute is addressing an ever-increasing community need to gain access to archive and library materials.

Development of the Digitisation project incorporates efforts from the AIATSIS Audiovisual Archives, Library, Research and Aboriginal Studies Press programs. In addition the organisation is partnering with other agencies to facilitate access to other collections of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. For example AIATSIS is partnering with the National Library of Australia (NLA) on the Pandora project which is to archive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander websites. We are also involved with the NLA to digitise the state legislation that enabled the forced removal of children from their families, and rare reports by Government Protectors who were responsible for administering the system that controlled the lives of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Digitisation of collections requires the identification of resources that are of keen interest to Indigenous communities, identification of the intellectual property holders, clearance of materials for electronic publication, and the publication of materials in a manner that allows easy access and navigation by users.

AIATSIS is at the forefront of best practice in this area and readily acknowledges and negotiates through community sensitivities involved in making such materials available to the general public. Given the rapid change in technologies for recording film, video, still photography, and audio materials, digitisation will be a key issue for all archives and libraries into the future. For example, without digitisation, unique recordings of ceremonies, language and music might be lost forever.

AIATSIS is well placed to provide assistance to others in this complicated technical and legal area. AIATSIS has undertaken extensive research projects to enable it to remain at the cutting edge of development of protocols about intellectual property laws, the potential of the Internet for collection access, digital recording standards and metadata standards associated with the provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections.

Since the Digitisation project was funded, a range of projects have been launched online. These include Treaty, the Wentworth Lectures, a collection of *Maningrida Mirage* community newsletters (1969–1974), an online exhibition

of excerpts from the Sorry Books, all issues of the historic *Dawn* and *New Dawn* magazines first published in the 1950s, records of the Freedom Ride of 1965, research records relating to the Torres Strait Islands, and the *Our Tracks* collection of personal biographies published online by the Press.

Geospatial searches of Indigenous cultural records

All AIATSIS's collection catalogue records are linked with coded map reference information and AIATSIS maintains an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language-name thesaurus that is also map coded. In the future this will enable the production of an Australian map-style interface for communities to search the collections. This material creates the key link between map reference points and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language names which is essential to developing more sophisticated search tools. With the appropriate support, this product could be developed as a key resource for all Australian public institutions. Its development would ultimately enable the user to point to locations on an interactive map to see the materials from that locale. A detailed explanation of the initial phase is provided as Appendix C. However the concept could be developed in multiple ways as a means of linking Internet resources; for example, a Google Earth style interface could be developed as a means to access multiple collection resources.

The Preserving Endangered Language Heritage Project

AIATSIS was funded for three years through the ATSIC Language Access Initiatives Program to undertake much needed preservation work on language material in its Recorded Sound Archive. This material, some 30,000 hours of unique, irreplaceable audio recordings collected over 40 years, represents the most extensive Indigenous recorded sound archive in world. Currently the Institute is focusing on languages undergoing revival. The production of compilation tapes of specific languages were a significant outcome of the project and Indigenous people and organisations will be able to access these to promote learning of their languages. AIATSIS's ultimate goal is the development of such materials for all the languages represented in the Archive.

Community Archives Workshops

Many organisations such as land councils, language centres and health centres have growing collections of tapes, videos, papers, CDs and photographs. These audiovisual collections start off small but often grow to the point of being unmanageable. Audiovisual materials are extremely fragile and vulnerable to heat, dust and humidity – the conditions in Australia – and if not stored and handled correctly will deteriorate.

Several years ago, the AIATSIS Audiovisual Archives program began running workshops for Indigenous communities to provide training in research and recording techniques and the management of audiovisual archival collections. The workshop participants are Indigenous people involved with collections of Indigenous material. The workshops are tailored to meet the needs of participants and organisations.

Subjects covered include sound and video recording, taking photographs, archival storage and handling, documentation of collections, copying, preservation, copyright and access issues, digitisation and disaster preparedness.

Workshops have been carried out at the Institute and at other locations. *Keeping Your History Alive* is a manual produced by AIATSIS to assist Indigenous communities and individuals who are caring for and collecting audiovisual material.

Aboriginal Studies Press

AIATSIS's publishing arm, Aboriginal Studies Press (ASP), publishes outstanding authors in a range of areas of Indigenous studies. They include health, anthropology, history, land rights, native title and languages, biography, autobiography, community stories and, occasionally children's literature. Up to twelve new titles are published annually and Indigenous authors, in particular, are encouraged to submit material for publication.

ASP also publishes the Institute's prestigious, scholarly journal, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* and sells cassettes and CDs, films and videos as well as books and reports.

ASP has a dedicated mini-website given to Indigenous storytellers, usually biographies, autobiographies and community stories. With adequate resources, ASP could add audio or even video footage and encourage Indigenous authors and storytellers to submit more material for the site. A print-on-demand mechanism would give those wanting it, a print version of selected texts/images.

ASP will soon be digitising its older backlist titles and making them available. Some will be licensed to third-party publishers for dissemination as e-books or via e-libraries. Others will be made available as read-only, or downloadable files, by chapter or in their entirety, free on the ASP website, as a resource to Indigenous communities. *Australian Aboriginal Studies* will be available in print and electronic form and licensed to third party database providers and e-publishers.

Selected new manuscripts, those where there is insufficient demand for commercial print quantities, will be digitised and sold (or distributed free) via ASP's website, or a third-party site, as downloadable files.

Research Program

AIATSIS has a 40-year history as the national research authority in Indigenous studies. It has a culture of collaborative and supportive research relationships with Indigenous communities throughout Australia and a strong focus on community-based research. AIATSIS collections are primarily developed through these research activities.

Intellectual Property Research

One current important project conducted in association with the Intellectual Property Research Institute of Australia (Melbourne University) includes detailed research of the development of community knowledge centres and the impacts of intellectual property laws on the manner in which these centres store and provide access to their digital collections. The results of this research, due for completion in September 2006, will be detailed recommendations for Australian cultural institutions and Indigenous community organizations on appropriate intellectual property frameworks relating to the creation and management of collections. These recommendations are directly relevant to any plans for the support of Indigenous Knowledge Centres or support of local digital media creation in the Backing Indigenous Ability program.

The Native Title Research Unit (NTRU)

The Native Title Research Unit (NTRU) is funded by the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination to conduct and facilitate research, organise workshops and seminars, and collect and publish research in native title. The NTRU provides essential research and strategic support to Native Title Representative Bodies (NTRBs) and native title claimants. The unit has prepared a detailed response on how the Backing Indigenous Ability Program can facilitate the work of NTRBs (see Appendix A).

IFaMP

Another key research project is the Indigenous Facilitation and Mediation project (IFaMP). This project is run within the AIATSIS Native Title Unit and is concerned to research best practice in Indigenous decision making and conflict management. Research from the Harvard Project indicates that fair and accountable dispute resolution processes lead to more effective governing institutions and enhances the confidence of constituents and external agencies. The ultimate objective of the AIATSIS mediation project is to facilitate the development of dispute resolution mechanisms within community governance structures as well as enabling access to dispute resolution skills development and independent mediation services by Indigenous people for Indigenous people in their domestic and professional capacities. The work is relevant not only to agreement making in the native title context but also to agreement making between communities and government agencies in the context of the new arrangements in government service delivery. This project has made a number of detailed recommendations on how the research could be useful to advancing the aims of the Backing Indigenous Ability program (see Appendix B).

AUSTLANG

Another AIATSIS research project involves the production of the AUSTLANG database. AUSTLANG assembles information about indigenous languages from a number of different sources such as Norman Tindale's Catalogue of Australian Aboriginal Tribes, OZBIB: A linguistic bibliography of Aboriginal Australia and the Torres Strait Islands, the AIATSIS library's catalogue, and various surveys/research papers on Indigenous languages. Thus, it offers a 'one-stop' database where users can easily and quickly find comprehensive information and resources on each Indigenous language without searching and

going through different sources and databases. AUSTLANG provides both historical (past) and present information about each Indigenous language.

Users can complete a search by a language name or place name and this will bring up ranked search results similar to a web search. Users then can bring up a 'language profile' of a particular language that contains a proposed standard name, other names and spellings used for the language, locations of the language, classification, speaker numbers, degree of endangerment, past research and publication etc of the language they are interested in. AUSTLANG provides an extensive list of publications on each Indigenous language and also have a link to the AIATSIS library catalogue, MURA, which has the most comprehensive collection of Indigenous studies. An extensive list of other names and spellings of each language in AUSTLANG assists users to find past documentation or information of language in different catalogues and databases - it could be difficult to find or locate some of past documentation without knowledge of such names and spellings since different institutions use different names/spellings. The list is also a useful aid for collecting institutions such as libraries and archives to catalogue items on Indigenous languages (and it is desirable if they employ standard names and spellings used in AUSTLANG).

Appendix A

NTRU submission

The discussion paper sets out many possibilities for enhancement of communication amongst Indigenous communities in Australia. There are a number of areas where AIATSIS could provide help in the form of advice or project management.

3.3.6 Culturally appropriate content and recording and archiving of culturally significant material

Many resources have been created offering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content, many of which are available on the Internet. A search of Google on “Indigenous sites” and “Australia” identifies over 18,500 Indigenous sites, many of which are portals or vortals pointing to hundreds of other relevant sites. Some of these sites have been evaluated as to whether the information they provide is up-to-date and culturally appropriate and there has been important work archiving important sites for posterity through the Pandora project. However more could be done to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the creation of resources that facilitate searching of the Internet and creating links between the most relevant and up-to-date materials. It is probable that a project like an extension of the Australian Indigenous Cultural Network (now complete and lodged with AIATSIS) could be developed as an Internet portal that assists communities to find the most relevant sites. The AICN was developed to facilitate Indigenous participation in the creation of Internet resources that hold cultural records.

The project could identify what has already been created by Indigenous communities. For example:

- Many language packages have already been created, and innovative programs and videos have been made by communities.
- Some universities, such as CDU, are producing education materials in conjunction with Indigenous elders and performers. They are also training Indigenous music students to record their own performances.
- The Trust and Technology Project <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/eirg/trust/method.html> is already scoping Indigenous needs for on-line access to archival resources and providing oral history material. It is working on access protocols so that communities can control access to materials.
- Benchmarks in successful recording and archiving standards are being set by the National Indigenous Recording Project, which has already lodged copies of their recordings with community centres. These include training and are done in conjunction with elders.

There is a need for an Indigenous group to work to create connections between such important materials and to identify new Internet projects that may enhance community use of the medium.

AIATSIS maintains expertise in many of the issues relevant to such developments and would be happy to contribute to the scoping or conduct of such a project.

5.2 Using existing infrastructure

Native Title Representative Bodies (NTRBs) are a network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies whose involvement in the initiative would be highly desirable. In addition schools and keeping places in communities already offer facilities for telecommunications networks and seem like the natural access points. It is possible that a survey is needed to identify what networks exist beyond those already created through TAPRIC and the capacity of these additional facilities. For example, what is the hardware/software in use in these organisations. Effective consultation with such key community organisations is essential.

5.3 Consultation

A theme of how to manage effective consultation with Indigenous communities runs throughout many of the question groups in the paper. There is recognition that such consultation is vital if the initiative is to succeed. Indigenous people need to define their own uses for the media and to have an equal say in the implementation and monitoring of service provision. However, internal tensions can arise when groups make decisions as to who will receive what and who will be the spokespeople.

The Native Title process has resulted in the creation of a number of contact points where Indigenous people can make their requirements known and can communicate with other groups. There are 18 Native Title Representative Bodies with 16 regional offices nationally who have regular contact with Indigenous people within the geographical areas for which they are responsible. It should be noted that many Indigenous organisations that act as native title representative bodies existed prior to the commencement of the Native Title Act and represent the interests of their members in relation to a wide range of issues including: land rights; protecting Indigenous cultures and languages; community development and infrastructure; and promoting economic development. All NTRBs are rigorously accountable to government. These agencies should be included in the consultation process for several reasons:

- They have been involved with their constituents for a long time.
- They maintain regular contact with Indigenous communities.
- A number of Indigenous people working in NTRBs have been trained in mediation techniques by the AIATSIS-sponsored Indigenous Facilitation and Mediation Project (IFaMP).
- Their brief covers many of the areas described in the *Backing Indigenous Ability* discussion paper.
- For optimum communication with remote communities, there are people involved in NTRBs that either speak Indigenous languages or can arrange for someone else who can.

Yet the level of funding to NTRBs is minimal at best and telecommunications infrastructure, especially amongst smaller agencies, needs upgrading. This has been experienced regularly, for example, when AIATSIS staff attempt to send emails. As Indigenous agencies, they could prove invaluable to the ICCs and other regional governmental departments during the decision-making, project formulation, and evaluation processes for the *Backing Indigenous Ability* (BIA) initiative. If some funding within the BIA initiative could be provided to upgrade their communication

facilities, especially with remote communities, they could further the aims of the program most effectively, especially in the establishment phase.

Appendix B

Prepared by The Indigenous Facilitation and Mediation Project (IFaMP), Native Title Research Unit (NTRU), AIATSIS

Backing Indigenous Ability (BIA) asks numerous questions of interest to IFaMP. These concern achieving sustainable telecommunications solutions for Indigenous communities, the identification of priority communities and priority needs, identification of community champions, the appropriateness of community champions, identifying models of delivering relevant culturally appropriate content, and engaging communities to use introduced telecommunications technology. BIA also asks two particularly important questions under **Section 4: Community Engagement and Sustainability**:

Q41: In delivering Backing Indigenous Ability in a culturally appropriate manner, what should be done to enable acceptance and ownership of telecommunications technology to aid sustainability within Indigenous communities?

Q42: What are some best practices in engaging communities in the planning, development and implementation stages of introducing or improving telecommunications technology?(p16)

Although both questions are placed under **4.1 - Culturally appropriate delivery of services**, rather than **4.2 – Sustainability**, it is IFaMP's view that the questions are pertinent to both sub-sections 4.1 and 4.2 which are inter-related. That is, without culturally appropriate delivery of services, there can be no sustainability.

BIA mentions under 4.1 that

Experience...indicates that specific approaches are required to engage communities and deliver services. For example, initial consultation with communities regarding programs and services and discussions within those communities regarding telecommunications initiatives may assist in the take up and use of telecommunications technology (p16).

We would recommend that consultation beyond an 'initial' stage is required if BIA is to apply its first key principle - that of following a culturally appropriate approach. Appropriate, sustained consultation, dialogue and information flow with Indigenous communities is required for BIA to be able to achieve a culturally appropriate delivery of services and for these services to be sustainable.

Skillful facilitated conversations are required, taking into account group dynamics and cultural needs in order for decisions to be owned and therefore sustainable. This is a particular, specialised service and often one which government employees do not/cannot provide/offer.

Another issue is; “Who is to be consulted?”

BIA mentions the possible use of/ involvement of Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) in the five key elements of the program. One possible role for ICCs is the identification of communities in need of services and identification of their priority needs.

Indigenous communities, like non-Indigenous communities, are far from homogenous and are comprised of different interest groups. Care is required to ensure consultation and hence identification of needs is with the ‘right’ people in the community and has the broadest of community support. Conflicts within and between communities over access to BIA is possible/likely if the program has to choose one community over another and if ‘spokespersons’ in the community are not identified by the community in a transparent and appropriate manner.

Facilitation of discussions regarding representation – who is to speak for communities – is a key initial step, that is, it must occur prior to consultation. This will also be required in identifying community champions.

Facilitation and possibly mediation is likely to be required to ensure a transparency of process in the identification of target communities and those communities’ priority needs. It will be essential to gaining acceptance of the agreements/decisions made (in effect, ensuring ownership of the decisions), which will impact on the sustainability of BIA.

IFaMP has identified that ICCs and other government structures in the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs lack capacity/skills in running decision-making and dispute management processes at present. Hence the consultation/dispute management/conflict management processes employed may be sub-optimal and detrimental to the roll-out, uptake, maintenance and long-term sustainability of BIA.

AIATSIS is ideally placed to assist as the overarching goal of IFaMP over the last three years has been to support best practice approaches to Indigenous decision-making and conflict management. Though this has been particularly in relation to the *Native Title Act 1993*, which emphasizes agreement-making through non-adversarial approaches, such as mediation and facilitation, lessons learned in the native title arena have applicability to whole-of-government policy and agreement-making approaches including Shared Responsibility and Regional Participation Agreements (SRA and RPA) and to a wide range of other Commonwealth and State/Territory government and non-Government programs and responsibilities.

Over the last three years, IFaMP has carried out a wide range of research and consultations including conducting a series of workshops and discussions with Indigenous community members, staff of NTRBs, Community Mediation Centres, mediation and facilitation practitioners, and Government and industry stakeholders.

Given that DoCTIA is entertaining the idea of BIA being linked to (elements incorporated into) Shared Responsibility Agreements or Regional Partnership Agreements, the critical research findings and Indigenous networks of IFaMP will be indispensable.

These findings include that Indigenous decision-making and conflict management processes must:

- build on existing Indigenous capacity in an environment of mutual respect, incorporate capacity building as an integral aspect of design and build the ‘readiness’ of all parties;
- see agreement-making as something which needs to be built up to in agreement-brokering processes and involve implementation phases rather than as the starting or end point of engagement with communities;
- recognize that no one size fits all, that there are no quick fix solutions and that procedural expertise consists in tailoring processes to Indigenous, Government and other stakeholder needs, and in ensuring that they reflect local ideas and laws regarding how authority should be organized, and how decisions should be made;
- be integrated with other services and approaches in the community, including ways of dealing with decision making and conflict, to allow for coordinated approaches, to ensure the implementation of strategies at a cross-agency level that complement and support one another, and to optimise the use of limited resources.

There is an urgent need and/or demand for (amongst other things):

- skilled facilitative processes in order that decisions are owned by communities and are therefore sustainable;
- arms length third party process experts, particularly a national network of skilled Indigenous facilitators and mediators who are available locally and regionally, and who are not beholden to government;
- understanding amongst stakeholders including government and communities about the importance of process in reaching agreements;
- building the capacity not only of communities in the areas of decision-making and conflict management, but also of government employees in designing and managing processes;
- standard setting, monitoring and evaluation processes in the facilitation and mediation arenas;
- information sharing between Indigenous dispute resolution practitioners, between Indigenous and non Indigenous practitioners, between Indigenous-specific and mainstream services and between those involved in different dispute resolution and conflict management practice and program areas;
- a national, integrated, long term approach to issues around Indigenous decision-making and conflict management where whole-of-government approaches also mean ‘whole-of-community’.

Indigenous decision-making and conflict management processes are core business for all who work with Indigenous people. How Indigenous communities do business both amongst each other, and with Governments and other stakeholders, holds the key to successful, sustainable and cost effective outcomes.

A whole-of-government approach necessarily involves government agencies working across portfolio boundaries with Indigenous communities as equal partners in an integrated government and Indigenous response. Decisions made by Indigenous communities in these processes must be fully informed and owned by them in order to be sustainable.

There are many contexts in which skilled mediators and facilitators could make a difference and, in particular, be cost effective. Process skills are in high demand not only in the new agreement-making culture with its focus on non-adversarial processes in Indigenous arrangements, but in most if not all aspects of Indigenous business.

Communities are bombarded with multiple and overlapping government programs about which they have little understanding and which lack co-ordination and that facilitative input aimed at an integrated approach could save significant Government funds. The BIA is no exception.

BIA is seeking 'innovative and flexible approaches' that 'allow tailoring to meet individual community needs and priorities' (p14). The employment of Indigenous facilitators and mediators to facilitate discussions with each community will allow each community's spokespersons and champions to be identified, and needs to be communicated. The facilitation processes employed, and the needs and approaches to delivering technology services identified and adopted could be different in each case.

Appendix C

Geospatial searches of Indigenous cultural records